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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: Launch of the Serbian Social Vulnerability Report

¶1. Summary: The UNDP in Serbia organized a conference on July 18 to discuss the findings of the Social Vulnerability Report of Roma, Refugees, and IDPs. The conference brought together GOS, EU, and UNDP officials as well as NGO leaders to discuss how programs are/should be implemented to address the situation. The publication of the report gives government and aid workers the chance to finally quantify something that has been a known problem for some time. End Summary.

¶2. According to the report, these groups, particularly the Roma population, continue to live in conditions of extreme poverty with limited access to education and healthcare. More importantly, while it was acknowledged that some progress had been made, the report notes that this has been minimal, and that the situation remains largely unchanged since aid efforts began. However, the EU representative and GOS officials working with EU integration highlighted that efforts to eliminate poverty and form a more inclusive society are key initiatives of the EU for candidate states, and that work in this area would become increasingly important as Serbia moves further through the integration process.

¶3. Many participants emphasized the differences between the groups, noting that Roma tend to live in chronic poverty lasting through generations, whereas the refugee and IDP populations are often in situational poverty resulting from displacement and face better prospects of future integration and economic advancement. Some participants criticized the policies of the GOS towards refugees and IDPs, claiming that the policies still assume that these groups will return to their original homes, while the reality is that many are already in the process of integration and establishing new lives here in Serbia. Other participants reminded the group of the need for policies aimed at the specific situation for women, especially among the Roma population. At times, the NGO leaders seemed at odd with the GOS and UNDP officials, one going so far as to call their strategies "fairy tales" far removed from the realities on the ground.

¶4. Comment: Two incidents occurred during the conference that are of interest. Svezana Sojanovic-Plavsic, G-17+ MP representing the Parliamentary Committee for Poverty, noted during her opening address that it was sad that "some parties have not taken part" in the committee, presumably referencing the DS walkout of parliament. Later, Dragisa Dabetic, Commissioner for Refugees in Serbia, responded angrily to one presenter who had discussed statistics for the actual number of Roma and Refugees/IDPs, stating that her numbers for Kosovo would make it seem that Roma could be the second largest ethnic group in that region, rather than the Serbs, which was an idea to which he was very strongly opposed. End Comment.

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